



LIVING CITIES

INNOVATE ► INVEST ► LEAD

Highlights of the Living Cities Sustainable Communities Boot Camp

From January 10-12, 2011, Living Cities convened a Sustainable Communities Boot Camp - the third in our signature boot camp series - at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The Boot Camp brought together teams of leaders from 13 regions that have received Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and provided those teams with intensive opportunities to interact with their peers, leading national experts, and senior officials from the Obama Administration. The Boot Camp's theme - "From Transaction to Transformation" - emphasized the importance of moving away from fragmented, project-oriented programs and instead toward integrated approaches to sustainable development that transform regions and the systems that shape them.



BOOT CAMP GOALS AND FRAMEWORK

Capitalizing on \$98 million in Sustainable Communities Planning Grants awarded by HUD to 45 regions in October 2010, the Boot Camp set out a framework designed to drive regional economic growth, harness private capital, and ensure meaningful and inclusive long-term participation by low-income people. Over the three days of the Boot Camp, the 13 participating regions focused intensively on the framework's key elements:

- **Economic Strategy** - To be successful, land use, transportation, and housing planning needs to be driven by and integrated into an overarching regional economic strategy.
- **Equity** - The development of sustainable communities must involve not only an inclusive process, but also equitable outcomes.
- **Environment** - Developing sustainable communities is an important component of efforts to improve environmental quality, and considerations of environment, economy, and equity need to be addressed in an integrated fashion.
- **Financing** - Mobilizing sufficient resources for sustainable development requires combining public, private, and philanthropic capital and creating an environment that engages market forces and private investment to maximize impact.
- **Collaboration** - Developing sustainable communities requires building and maintaining long-term, collaborative structures across political jurisdictions, issues, and sectors.

The program offered a mix of plenaries, panels, and breakout sessions where members of the 13 regional teams were exposed to the best thinking in the field. Each regional group also met as a team for three one-hour sessions and had opportunities to network with and learn from counterparts from other regions.

Over the course of the three days, participants also interacted with a number of key Obama Administration officials, who highlighted current Administration initiatives across agencies to encourage cross-sectoral and collaborative policymaking on sustainable communities issues. The first evening's dinner program featured Ron Sims, Deputy Secretary at HUD, Bob Perciasepe, Deputy Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Therese McMillan, Deputy Administrator for the Federal Transit Administration at the Department of Transportation (DOT), and Xav Briggs, Associate Director for General Government Programs at the White House's Office of Management and Budget.

Shelley Poticha, Senior Advisor for Sustainable Housing and Communities at HUD, offered framing remarks at the beginning and end of the Boot Camp. Teams from HUD, EPA, and DOT - all members of the Administration's Partnership for Sustainable Communities - were present throughout the Boot Camp and participated in dialogue with the regional teams individually and as a group.

The work of the participants was enriched by a resource guide, which included a series of case studies highlighting promising practices adopted by cities and regions.



*Xavier de Souza Briggs, Associate Director for General Government Programs,
Office of Management and Budget, The White House*

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

An opening session featured case studies of two regions that have had particular success in advancing regional prosperity and sustainability through equitable transit-oriented development. Arlene Rodriguez, Living Cities' new Director of Partnerships and External Affairs, analyzed the multifaceted work of the Great Communities Collaborative in the San Francisco Bay Area, and Mary Sue Barrett of Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council described Chicago's experience in building strong cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral collaborations.

In a plenary on regional economic prosperity, St. Paul Mayor Christopher Coleman highlighted the importance of neighboring localities working together collaboratively, rather than viewing each other as potential

competitors. Kathy Schmidkofer of General Mills and the Itasca Project discussed successful engagement with the private sector in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Brad Whitehead of the Fund for Our Economic Future discussed the process of bringing cross-sector collaboration and planning together to advance the regional economy in Northeast Ohio.

PolicyLink Founder and CEO Angela Glover Blackwell headlined a plenary on equitable outcomes, emphasizing that equity should be viewed as central to the economic growth strategy for cities and regions. Teresa Lynch of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City then discussed the spatial dimensions of equity, focusing on the importance of fully integrating inner cities into regional economic growth strategies.

In a final plenary on the challenges of implementation, John Robert Smith and Anthony Williams drew on their experiences as mayors of Meridian, MS, and Washington, DC, to provide lessons about successful implementation processes – from community outreach to private-sector engagement. Jonathan Rose, President of Rose Companies, gave participants a useful view of financing and implementation challenges from the perspective of private-sector development.

A lunchtime program featuring former Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels and Alan Durning of the Sightline Institute used a variety of examples to drive home the message that ambitious goals can be achieved. A collaboration clinic and a variety of breakout sessions throughout the three days provided in-depth focus on core topics including designing robust collaborative processes, planning for a regional economy, and financing transit-oriented development.



Anthony Williams, Former Mayor of Washington DC, William H. Bloomberg Lecturer in Public Management, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School

BOOT CAMP OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The emphasis of the Sustainable Communities Boot Camp on the overall elements of the framework - economic strategy, equity, environment, financing, and collaboration - focused the teams' assessments of where their work was strong and where it could benefit from the best practices being implemented elsewhere. Team huddles allowed the regions to reflect on the stories of planning and implementation presented during the Boot Camp and to wrestle with how the framework and lessons of the Boot Camp should be incorporated into their work. The breakout sessions provided team members with the opportunity to interact more intensively with experts to help teams build their capacity in each of the issue areas. At the end of the Boot Camp, the teams reported to the assembled participants about specific next steps that they intended to pursue when they returned home. Here, some teams identified more fundamental tasks, such as development of an overall economic strategy, while teams that were somewhat further along in their development identified more specific tasks, for example, developing a concrete plan to build support among private-sector CEOs.

While the Boot Camp underscored the extent to which the 13 regional teams are at different stages in their development, all of the teams emerged from the program with a greater awareness of the concrete steps that must be taken in order to move their work from planning stages to eventual successful implementation. Teams identified a number of common challenges, including: how to frame their plans in terms of a regional economic strategy and how to incorporate equity as a central consideration; how to engage most productively with employers and developers; how to successfully build collaborative relationships and mobilize support at the local level; and how best to utilize philanthropic resources. Many of the teams expressed an interest in identifying additional resources to help them address these challenges beyond the Boot Camp.

The Boot Camp was strategically timed to coincide with the negotiation of the regional grantees' work plans with HUD. HUD has committed to working with the grantees to incorporate what they learned at the Boot Camp into the regional work plans. HUD is also interested in sharing what was learned at the Boot Camp with the other 32 regions that received Sustainable Communities Planning Grants but were not present at the Boot Camp.

By convening teams of grantees and federal officials from HUD, EPA, DOT, and the White House, the Boot Camp helped to institutionalize the kind of cross-agency collaboration that is essential to policy and implementation success. Federal representatives at the Boot Camp also heard from the regional teams about additional agencies that could productively be incorporated into the federal partnership on sustainable communities.

Federal officials heard reports on the work of the teams, and each team was also given the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a team of federal representatives to discuss areas of particular regional concern. As a result, the Boot Camp provided HUD, EPA, and DOT with the opportunity to gather data from the 13 sites about ways in which their agencies can more productively advance sustainable communities work - for example, by better connecting the teams with federal resources and helping to remove bureaucratic obstacles to the teams' success. This feedback set the stage for the federal agencies to try to work more systematically to support the teams' efforts, including through data, technical assistance, and capacity-building.

The presence of Living Cities members at the Boot Camp allowed the regional teams to deepen their thinking about the possible roles that philanthropy can play in advancing sustainable communities work in their respective regions. The Boot Camp also offered Living Cities members a helpful lens through which to view the current landscape of sustainable communities work not only in the 13 regions, but also more broadly.



Mayor Christopher B. Coleman, City of St. Paul

POTENTIAL FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In addition to having an immediate impact on the thinking and work of the participants, the Boot Camp also provided an informative look at a number of issues within the field overall. Some of these issues may suggest opportunities for additional work by Living Cities, its members, or other players in the field.

Overall Framework - Boot Camp participants responded positively to the Boot Camp's overall framework of how to think about sustainable development - especially its central role in economic prosperity. A key question is how to disseminate this framework more broadly going forward.

Data - A common theme throughout the Boot Camp was the need for better data to inform the work on the ground. Presentations highlighting the useful role that data can play in thinking about regional economic strategy and equitable outcomes underscored the sense among many participants that their regions lack the data that they need to be most effective.

Financing - A number of participants made clear that, while they recognized the need to engage developers constructively, they did not necessarily know how best to do that. Many participants also lacked a clear view of what the various pieces of sustainable development work are that need to be financed, and what the menu of options are for financing them.

Role of Private Sector - Regional teams at the Boot Camp universally recognized the importance of engaging the private sector (employers in particular) as allies in their work. However, in many cases this recognition was not matched by a strong sense of how best to launch that process of engagement.

Structure of Collaboration - Participants focused on the question of what stakeholders need to be included in a successful collaboration, and took part in a collaboration clinic designed to build capacity in this area. A clear lesson of the Boot Camp was that additional work needs to be done in this area to increase the likelihood of transformative change occurring.

Public Sector Obstacles - Participants expressed concern about public sector obstacles at multiple levels of governance. Some participants experienced their Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as an obstacle, while others found the regional offices of federal agencies to be a hindrance rather than a help in advancing their work. Other teams identified particular federal regulations or funding requirements as problematic.

The Role of Elected Leaders and the Public - Many teams at the Boot Camp noted the importance of enlisting greater support from local elected officials and from the broader public. Participants expressed an interest in more concentrated attention to strategies and capacity-building in these areas.

Communications/Messaging - A significant number of Boot Camp participants expressed concern that they lacked the messaging tools that they needed to communicate the benefits of sustainable development to the broad set of local audiences whose support they want to enlist.



*Jasmine Thomas, Surdna Foundation and
Lee Sheehy, McKnight Foundation*



*Terry Bellamy, Mayor of Asheville, North Carolina
and the Western North Carolina Team*



Benjamin Kennedy, Kresge Foundation



*Shelley Poticha, Director for the Office
of Sustainable Housing and
Communities, HUD*